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# History of betrayals in Kashmir

In abrogating the provisions of Article 370, the Centre has disinterred a corpse in order to bury it again. Only a widely uninformed Indian civil society can rejoice in such an exercise in futility and not see the cynical search for political gains that is its aim.

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May 1948: Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru with Maharaja Hari Singh in Srinagar.

The vast majority of views offered in various forms of the media over the last few days, whether in favour or against, have evoked the dramatic nature of what was done on August 5, 2019, when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced its decision not only to revoke Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution but also to reshape the former State of Jammu and Kashmir by partitioning it and downgrading the two new

components. Although the fact that the current BJP government actually went ahead with the measure that took most people in India and elsewhere by surprise, perhaps the writing had been on the wall.

If the general election in May 2014 had brought the BJP to power at the Centre with an unexpectedly commanding majority, the year ended with another record-making victory in State elections. The party had, for the first time, made an inroad into the elected power structure of Jammu and Kashmir and formed a coalition government with the Kashmir-based Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Since 2014, then, Kashmir has been at perihelion with the Hindu Rashtra or at least the ambition of bringing one into being. It has been feeling more directly than before the heat of the rhetoric and agendas the BJP and its affiliated organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) deploy. In this project Kashmiri Muslims are made to serve as contrapuntal symbols—of terrorist violence, illegitimate religious impulses, sedition—for contriving a mythical Hindu nation. This evocatory purpose that Kashmiris serve is so essential to Hindutva's discursive politics that it was perhaps inevitable that it would not only continue to be exploited but would be ratcheted up. Reducing the “Kashmir problem” into easily digestible capsules, the BJP's rhetoric has long focussed on the abrogation of Article 370, which is projected as a blasphemy against the cult of national integration.

But countless scholarly works have shown that Article 370 had already been neutered over the course of roughly two decades after its inclusion in the Indian Constitution on October 17, 1949. While Maharaja Hari Singh's signing of the Instrument of Accession on October 26, 1947, had brought Jammu and Kashmir into India, its terms restricted New Delhi's jurisdiction over the former princely state to matters of foreign affairs, defence, currency and communications. This “statutory autonomy” was later inserted into India's Constitution as Article 370. But the autonomy covenanted in the latter was unremittingly abraded beginning in 1953. Until it was unceremoniously revoked on August 5, 2019, its main role was that of a red flag that provoked, on the one hand, the anger of Kashmiris who had seen betrayal in its nullity and, on the other, the ire of